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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 014218

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SUBJECT: CHINESE SCHOLARS, MEDIA REACT TO DPRK MISSILE TESTS

REF: A. BEIJING 14173
[1](#)B. BEIJING 14109

Classified By: Political Section Chief Robert
Griffiths. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The DPRK's July 4/5 missile tests will likely not significantly alter China's policy toward North Korea and the nuclear issue, scholars and media contacts told us. The United States can expect a tougher tone from Beijing toward the DPRK but no willingness to take concrete action such as imposing tighter sanctions. China is engaged in a balancing act, one scholar said, attempting to prevent North Korea from committing provocative actions while also trying to keep the United States from "going too far" and taking measures that China believes could destabilize the region. At the same time, the tests probably do not mean the DPRK intends to abandon the Six-Party Talks. Rather, the test may constitute a DPRK effort to improve its negotiating position for future rounds. Media coverage has been straightforward, but the missile tests have not been front page news. Contacts said the Propaganda Department has issued guidelines banning opinion pieces in the press and restricting content to official Xinhua wire service copy. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Most of our regular interlocutors on North Korea are as yet unwilling to engage in discussion with us, pending a clear indication from central authorities as to the direction in China's policy. They noted that they had seen little so far regarding the missile launches from Chinese sources and had to rely primarily on U.S. and Japanese news sources. Even so, we were able to get some sense of how the issue is resonating with Chinese intellectuals.

No Dramatic Shift Likely

[1](#)3. (C) The United States should not expect a dramatic shift in China's North Korea policy in the wake of the July 4/5 missile tests, said Shi Yinhong (protect), Director of the Center for American Studies at Renmin University. China is unlikely to take significant concrete action beyond "going in the direction of being harsher" in its statements about the launches. In Shi's view, Chinese Ambassador to the United Nations Wang Guangya's comments that the missile tests have had a "non-beneficial" effect on security and stability in northeast Asia reflect the tougher tone. Nonetheless, China's views on how to handle the DPRK weapons programs have not changed. China wants to achieve a denuclearized Korean peninsula through

peaceful negotiation. Shi predicted that China will remain unwilling to support using tougher tools, such as tighter sanctions, to influence the DPRK's behavior, Shi predicted.

14. (C) As for how the missile tests might influence China's approach to ties with the United States, the Government is engaged in a difficult balancing act, Shi said. On one hand, China wants to prevent the DPRK from taking highly provocative actions. On the other, China wants to keep the United States from "going too far" in terms of sanctions or other measures that might threaten regional stability. There is no doubt China would prefer not to have a nuclear-armed North Korea as a neighbor, but does not believe it can go beyond negotiations to achieve this.

Negotiating Tactic?

15. (C) What the missile tests mean in terms of moving forward with the Six-Party Talks is hard to gauge, said Tao Wenzhao (protect), a former scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and frequent television commentator. He added that it is hard to imagine what the North Koreans think they will gain from the launches, speculating that the tests do not necessarily indicate North Korea has given up on negotiations. More likely the DPRK is trying to position itself more advantageously for the next round of talks. The DPRK may have taken inspiration from the Iranians, who appear to be getting more attention, and a better deal, via threatening behavior and being tough.

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16. (C) Tao speculated that Pyongyang is intentionally attempting to annoy and provoke the United States and Japan, partly because of frustration over the financial sanctions issue. In this connection, North Korea may also simply be feeling anxious and impatient. The missile tests could signify a sense in the DPRK government that something needed to be done to change the dynamic ahead of the next round of talks. Nonetheless, Tao acknowledged that even if the DPRK actions amount to posturing, the unintended result could be a deterioration in the security situation in Northeast Asia.

Launch Further Slows 2005 Momentum

17. (C) Vice President of the China Institute for International Studies Ruan Zongze (protect) said the DPRK launch was very unfortunate and a continuation of actions that have harmed the Six-Party process. Ruan expressed his personal view that the financial sanctions placed on the DPRK had also slowed the momentum of the Talks that peaked last year following the Joint Statement. The DPRK action should be viewed as Pyongyang wanting to attract attention because it believes that the United States has been pre-occupied with other international issues and is no longer interested in making progress in the Six-Party Talks. He speculated that VFM Wu Dawei would make a strong effort to calm tensions and move the DPRK back to the table when he visits Pyongyang next week, accompanying Vice Premier Hui Liangyu in his visit there to celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of the China-DPRK Friendship Treaty.

Media Hews to Official Line

18. (C) Chinese media have presented straightforward

but hardly blanket coverage of the DPRK missile tests. China Central Television news broadcasts have repeated impartial news dispatches featuring the DPRK's confirmation of the launches, reactions from foreign countries (including the United States), activity at the United Nations and the Chinese MFA's official statement. Most major dailies have relegated the story to inside pages, running only official Xinhua wire service copy. Internet news sites were slightly more colorful. Xinhua included on its website front page a small section with a graphic of a DPRK missile and links to previous reports on the facts of the launch. CCTV's website reported DPRK's confirmation of the launch but carried fewer links to other reports than Xinhua, while the People's Daily site carried no visible links to the missile story on its front page.

19. (C) The Propaganda Department has issued guidelines banning opinion pieces regarding the missile launches in the press and restricting content to official Xinhua wire service copy, said Zhou Qing'an (protect), who regularly contributes commentary on international issues to the progressive daily Beijing News. Zhou said that writing commentary about the DPRK is difficult even beyond the context of the missile tests because censors normally forbid critical pieces about the North Korean regime. As a result, he has decided not try to contribute anything on the missile tests to the Beijing News. "If you want to write the truth, it will never get published," Zhou complained.

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